

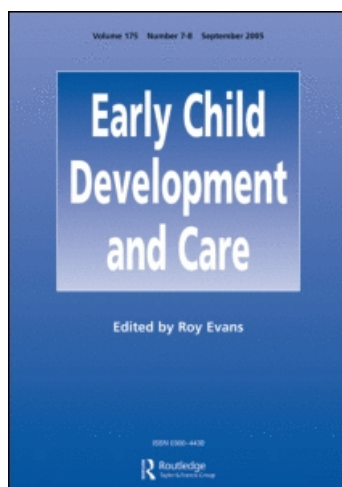
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## EDITORIAL

# Men in caring, parenting and teaching: exploring men's roles with young children

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Across the international scene common features consistently occur in relation to men's involvement in the lives of young children. There have been repeated government initiatives to attract more men into educare contexts (Mills et al., 2004) while developing father's interest in young children have also been on the agenda. However such enterprises have not always been straightforward. At a transnational level difficulties have arisen with regard to both recruitment and retention of males in early childhood contexts and 'father's programmes' have had a chequered history. Such initiatives have taken place against a background of many conflicting discourses. For example, it is perceived that the teaching profession is 'in crisis' due to the lack of male teachers. The feminisation of primary teaching is seen to be detrimental—to male pupils in particular (Bleach, 1998; Johannesson, 2004). This view has been promulgated by media, teaching unions and governments alike. Equally, within the public discourse there are oppositional strands. Males in educare must cope with discourses of both risk and adulation. On the one hand, they are hailed as important male role models in a society where absentee fathers are prevalent. On the other, they are subject to suspicion manifested both in homophobia or accusations of abuse. They are perceived variously as super-heroes or demons, the latter being by far the strongest discourse (Jones, 2007). All men who enter and stay in such professions have to deal with suspicion it appears (Martino & Berrill, 2003) and may at certain points be perceived as 'high risk' (McWilliam & Jones, 2005). The effect is to effectively keep the numbers of men in educare contexts down.

Within postmodern society the cultural construction of masculinity together with patriarchal assumptions about gendered identities have been challenged. There has been a so-called 'crisis in masculinity', where the concept of a single fixed unified masculinity is difficult to justify. Rather, for men, multiple identities/masculinities are on offer from which they may choose. The concepts of hybridised, bricolage

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masculinity are presented whereby men may 'channel hop' across versions of the masculine according to need (Beynon, 2002). However, besides opening up certain freedoms for men, tensions also result from the multiplicity of identities presented.

For example, although it may be maintained that men are capable of caring for young children (King, 2005) close involvement may be perceived as the prerogative of women, who are widely held as being 'better for the job' and dominate the caring professions. Linked to this and prevalent within the public discourse is the denigration of involvement with young children as 'women' work', while dominant forms of male heterosexuality are characterised by the need to avoid closeness in relationships and to fear emotions (Kimmel, 1994; Connell, 2005) neither of which are called for in early childhood settings. Such disparate discourses impact and present difficulties for men in contemporary society.

This Special Issue presents an international perspective on the involvement of men in the lives of young children across a range of differing contexts. It explores the lived experiences of both fathers and men in educate and in addition considers what it is to be a man in the twenty-first century. As such this collection is pertinent, timely and responds to issues which are of concern to those within educate, to those within families and also to the public in general.

In the initial chapter, Alice Honig provides a comprehensive review of research on fathering together with research on men employed in work with young children. Both centres and elementary schools as places of work are considered. Throughout, Honig emphasises the importance of positive male engagement with young children for their optimal development. She notes however, that research reveals the complexity of studying these relationships and that barriers in families and society exist which impede the implementation of positive interactions. Within this chapter, suggestions are given for increasing positive male participation in the home and in educational settings.

Deborah Jones presents research undertaken with male headteachers in early years schools within the UK and explores several influential discourses in relation to male headteachers' identities. The chapter discusses the ways in which different identities are constructed for headteachers by parents, governors and wider society and also how a variety of discourses impact on men's professional lives. Jones examines themes inherent in headteachers' discourses as they reflect upon their roles and experiences within the school context and consider the practice of identity construction. She notes that tensions are increased as a result of multiple, frequently conflicting identities for example the pressure to present both distant and caring personae. The chapter concludes by acknowledging that the role of headship functions to protect men from the denigration to which other male teachers are sometimes subjected. However, the role may operate to distance them from the closer relationships which they frequently desire. As such being a male headteacher is characterised by complexity.

Michel Vandenbroeck and Jan Peeters's paper on gender and professionalism draws attention to gender segregation in the caring professions. They note that research and experiments so far show that it may take decades of multiple actions to overcome the gender divide in the caring workforce. However, research that includes the voices of

men in child care is rather recent, scarce and involves only very small samples of male carers. Therefore, they suggest, little is known about the students' perspectives on how the gendered culture of the profession is transmitted through overt or covert curricula and how this may affect them. By means of three studies the authors begin to unveil how future male carers are affected by both overt and covert gendered curricula. A first study interviewed 30 students in initial training, while a second study involved 16 men in adult education for caring professions. A third study examined 1635 pages of textbooks. Together the studies show how both overt and covert curricula affect younger students more than their adult colleagues and how persistent, long-term strategies are needed to attract both men and women into the care workforce.

Mary Thornton and Patricia Bricheno provide a particular focus on men in teaching. They note that the number of males in teaching has always been small, particularly in early childhood. Nevertheless those that do enter the profession usually do so for the same reasons as women, namely enjoyment of working with children, wanting to teach and wanting to make a difference to children's lives. However, in two separate studies Thornton and Bricheno (2006) have shown that on beginning teacher training in 1998, and at the point of leaving the profession in 2005, men and women tend to emphasise different concerns. This chapter explores those differences and seeks possible explanations for how men's views of teaching might be changing over time.

Sarah-Eve Farquhar explores New Zealand men's participation in early years work and notes that the history of kiwi men's participation in paid early child care and teaching work has not been documented to date. Farquhar argues that what can be learned from the New Zealand experience may be helpful internationally in the movement towards greater male representation in early years work. Therefore, this paper provides a brief recent history, highlighting issues that may be specific to New Zealand's cultural and political context as well as those likely to be generic to men's experiences within any western country.

A review of the literature on father involvement in early childhood programmes is presented by Glen Palm and Jay Fagan. They acknowledge that father involvement in early childhood programmes has increased rapidly during the past 10–15 years. This chapter reviews their understanding of the current state of father involvement in early childhood programmes and in so doing, employs two theoretical frameworks: ecological perspective and situated fathering. Palm and Fagan draw from the research and practice literature to understand the current levels of father involvement in early education programmes, the factors that support this type of father involvement, the barriers to father involvement and strategies for increasing father involvement in early childhood programmes.

The paper by Carol Potter and John Carpenter presents a case study from the UK, of one Sure Start programme's significant success in engaging large numbers of fathers with its services. The paper details both the levels of male involvement in the programme over time and the strategies found to be effective in involving men. Numbers of fathers using programme services rose to over 100 in 2005, with the total number of male attendances exceeding 1000 in that same year. The successful engagement of fathers in this programme's activities was found to be as a result of a

combination of both strategic and day to day approaches. Effective strategic approaches were close partnership working with an expert local voluntary agency, the use of a gender differentiated approach and in-going commitment to the work at programme management level. Factors related to success at a day-to-day level included the high level of skill and persistence demonstrated by a dedicated father worker and the implicit use of a social marketing approach. Throughout, Potter and Carpenter discuss findings in the context of current national policy contexts relating to father engagement.

Flora Macleod contributes an important perspective on why fathers are not attracted to family learning groups. She notes that accounts of fathers' reluctance to engage with locally based family learning groups rarely acknowledge the relationship between learning and identity. This tends not to be the case in parallel accounts of women's reluctance to become involved in groups or networks where the mainstream clientele is male. Drawing on the case study of a national initiative aimed at developing family literacy in local communities throughout the UK, Macleod argues that decisions to join or not to join these groups is primarily social and cultural rather than individual. This means that the attendance of fathers at family learning events needs to be understood in context. It also means addressing the complexities underpinning their reasons for not attending from a lifelong perspective. When this approach is taken the implications for policy and practice become clearer. What works for some will not work for others. Rather than relying on a standard provision for all, what is needed suggests Macleod, is a range of high quality dedicated provision that caters for different requirements, specifically in this case, the differing needs and preferences of mothers and fathers.

Lisa Newland, Diana Coyl and Harry Freeman take predicting preschoolers attachment security as their focus. Associations between preschoolers' attachment security, fathers' involvement (i.e. parenting behaviours and consistency) and fathering context (i.e. fathers' internal working models and use of social support) were examined in a subsample of 102 fathers, taken from a larger sample of 235 culturally diverse US families. The authors' predicted that fathers' involvement would mediate associations between children's attachment security and less proximal fathering context. Fathers completed questionnaires regarding their parenting behaviours, internal working models of adult relationships, their use of social support and an attachment Q-List to assess their preschoolers' attachment security. Fathers' involvement mediated the relationship between fathering context and children's attachment security. Newland et al. discuss the ways in which their findings support an ecological view of children's attachment security within a multilayered system.

The paper by Harry Freeman, Lisa Newland and Diana Coyl explores fathers' beliefs as a mediator between contextual barriers and father involvement. They examine fathers' beliefs as mediators between multiple risk factors and involvement practices with children age from 0 to 5 enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start. As part of their research, a diverse sample of 101 fathers, living in rural midwestern communities of the USA completed questionnaires assessing *mediators* (i.e. parenting efficacy, role beliefs and responsibility to an intervention programme), *barriers* (e.g. lack

of time, energy, work constraints) and *father involvement* (i.e. physical play, didactic engagement, caregiving, socialisation, involvement in the programme and accessibility). In each of the regression models, father efficacy and beliefs reduced the influence of barriers and were significant unique predictors of father involvement. Findings suggest that fathers' beliefs are more proximal to parenting practices than is family context. Freeman et al. explore the implications of their research for early intervention programmes specifically serving children in at-risk families.

Bernard Spodek and Olivia Saracho's chapter discusses studies that provide the historical and contemporary patterns of father involvement in the USA. In this way researchers are provided with an understanding of contemporary fatherhood. Spodek and Saracho describe the historical patterns and research on father involvement that created methodological and conceptual challenges in conducting studies that characterise fathers. A number of frequent measurement approaches, challenges and limitations that are found in such studies are presented and discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and practical applications that can guide researchers to improve their studies on fathers and to better understand the complexity of fatherhood.

Olivia Saracho takes as her focus fathers and young children's literacy experiences. A family literacy programme was investigated to document the literacy experiences of 25 fathers and their five-year-old children. Using a case study methodology, she examined the effects of a literacy intervention that was designed to assist fathers to promote their children's acquisition of literacy. The results indicated that the fathers who learn literacy strategies and related activities can contribute to their children's literacy development. Fathers in the literacy intervention programme received the same literacy instruction, but they modified the instruction not only to their own personal style, but also to the literacy strategies, interactions, materials and activities that they learned. The trends and innovations in the literacy programme related to the teaching-learning process and their collaboration. Saracho emphasises that both trends and innovations indicated that the fathers could make important contributions to their children's literacy development.

In the final chapter, John Barker considers men and motors and the ways in which fathers are involved in children's travel. He notes that while there is a growing body of literature considering the different settings in which young children spend their time, less explored is how children travel to and from the different everyday spaces of childhood. Although research on gendered carescapes has identified the central role of mothers in caring for and escorting children, as well as the changing role of fathers, little attention has been paid to the role of and expectations of fathers in relation to undertaking these escorting tasks. Drawing upon research conducted in the UK with young children and their families, Barker contributes to existing debates by exploring the role of fathers in escorting children to a variety of settings, considering how fathers may have diverse experiences of escorting. He also explores how cars play a particularly important role for fathers' escort of children, and how fathers' involvement may create particular masculine styles of caring which are distinctive from those children experience with mothers.



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